

CAN GOD BE SEEN

Series: A LITTLE BIT OF THIS, A LITTLE BIT OF THAT

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From Genesis to Malachi, Scripture consistently presents compelling accounts of God visibly appearing and personally interacting with individuals. Yet, at the same time, the Bible emphatically asserts God's inherent invisibility and inaccessibility to human sight. John declares plainly, "No man hath seen God at any time" (John 1:18), and Paul explicitly identifies the Father as dwelling "in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see" (1 Timothy 6:16). Moreover, Paul teaches that God's fundamental nature and divine attributes are inherently invisible, discerned only indirectly through creation (Romans 1:20), and describes Christ specifically as "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15).

This apparent contradiction—visible manifestations of an inherently invisible God—is resolved by understanding that every visible revelation of God recorded in the Old Testament is, in fact, an appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ, the Son of God. Christ, as the eternal Word (John 1:1, 14), is the bodily expression of the Godhead (Colossians 2:9), uniquely mediating God's invisible essence and glory in forms that humanity can safely encounter. Thus, these Old Testament appearances of God, or Christophanies, affirm Christ's eternal deity and His distinct role as mediator between God and humanity.

EXODUS 33: THE GLORY OF GOD AND MOSES' ENCOUNTER

Exodus 33 provides a clear illustration of this distinction. When Moses asks God, "shew me thy glory" (Exodus 33:18), he is requesting an unfiltered revelation of God's essential majesty. God responds decisively:

"Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live." (Exodus 33:20)

Yet, earlier in the same chapter, we read:

"And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend." (Exodus 33:11)

These verses appear contradictory at first glance. However, the key lies in recognizing that "face to face" refers to intimate, personal communication through a mediated appearance rather than an unveiled display of divine glory. When Moses seeks the fullness of God's glory, God mercifully limits the revelation, permitting Moses to see only His "back parts" (Exodus 33:23). Thus, Moses experiences a genuine yet carefully mediated revelation, demonstrating that God's visible interactions are graciously accommodated to human limitations. These interactions are best understood as appearances of Christ—the Son who reveals the Father without overwhelming humanity with His absolute holiness.

JACOB'S WRESTLING: SEEING GOD YET SURVIVING (GENESIS 32:24–30)

One of the most remarkable theophanies in Scripture occurs in Genesis 32, when Jacob—alone and vulnerable on the night before his reunion with Esau—is suddenly confronted by an unknown figure:

"And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day." (Genesis 32:24)

At first glance, this is just "a man." But by the end of the account, this man **blesses** Jacob, **renames** him Israel (a covenantal act), and Jacob himself declares:

"I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." (Genesis 32:30)

Jacob's statement is not poetic hyperbole. It is the theological conclusion of a man who knew he had encountered someone far greater than a mere man or angel. He wrestled with God, and he survived.

So how can Jacob say he saw God face to face and yet live? The only consistent answer is that he encountered God in a veiled, bodily form—not the unmediated glory of the Father, but a visible manifestation of God that a man could grapple with, physically and personally.

That is, this was a Christophany—an appearance of the pre-incarnate Son of God.

THE MAN WHO BLESSES LIKE GOD

The text goes out of its way to link this man with divine authority. He not only contends with Jacob, but also renames him:

“Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.”
(Genesis 32:28)

The act of renaming someone—especially in covenantal contexts—is a divine prerogative. Abram becomes Abraham (Genesis 17:5); Sarai becomes Sarah (Genesis 17:15). Jacob is now renamed Israel, and the one doing the renaming is clearly more than a man.

Moreover, the text repeatedly avoids calling the figure merely an angel. Hosea 12:3–5 later reflects on this moment:

“He had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him: he found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us; even the LORD God of hosts; the LORD is his memorial.”

Hosea uses the term "angel" (*MALAK*) but clarifies that this “angel” was the LORD God of hosts. This angel is not a created messenger. He *IS* God. This matches the pattern of the Angel of the LORD seen throughout the Old Testament: one who speaks as God, is called God, and accepts worship.

A GOD WHO CAN BE TOUCHED

Jacob did not merely receive a vision. He physically wrestled this figure for hours. He touched Him, resisted Him, was wounded by Him. The Son—who would one day take fully human form—here comes in His eternal physical form, and Jacob is able to struggle with Him, and be changed by the encounter.

This tangible wrestling makes clear that God was present in a body, not in smoke or fire or abstract theophany. And yet, it was a restrained presence. The man “touches” Jacob’s thigh and disables him instantly (v.25)—a gesture of effortless power. The figure could have crushed Jacob with a word, but He allows the struggle to unfold.

Conclusion:

Jacob’s midnight wrestling match was no dream, no metaphor, and no allegory. It was a direct, bodily encounter with God—and yet Jacob lived. The only consistent biblical explanation is that this was the Son, the only person of the Godhead who can be seen and touched. The Son alone can wrestle with man without consuming him, bless him without annihilating him, and reveal the face of God without destroying the beholder. Jacob named the place Peniel, saying:

ABRAHAM’S VISITORS: THE LORD ON EARTH AND IN HEAVEN

Genesis 18 presents another striking example. Abraham receives three visitors, one of whom the text explicitly identifies as "the LORD" (Genesis 18:1, 13, 17). Abraham demonstrates clear recognition of this visitor’s divine nature, reverently addressing Him as God, humbly interceding before Him, and acknowledging himself as a servant (Genesis 18:3, 27, 30). Significantly, Genesis 19:24 distinguishes between "the LORD" present visibly on earth and "the LORD" raining judgment from heaven:

"Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven."

This subtle linguistic distinction strongly suggests plurality within the Godhead, clearly identifying the visible figure with whom Abraham converses as the pre-incarnate Christ. Thus, the narrative not only indicates the pre-existence and divinity of Christ but also highlights His unique role as mediator between heaven’s invisible God and humanity on earth.

CAPTAIN OF THE LORD’S HOST: JOSHUA’S WORSHIP

In Joshua 5:13–15, Joshua encounters a formidable figure identifying Himself as the "Captain of the host of the LORD." Joshua immediately responds with reverent worship, an act accepted without rebuke. The divine figure explicitly sanctifies this act, commanding Joshua:

"Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy." (Joshua 5:15)

Such acceptance of worship sharply distinguishes this divine warrior from ordinary angels, who consistently refuse worship (Revelation 19:10; 22:8–9). Instead, this event mirrors Moses' encounter at the burning bush (Exodus 3:5), strongly indicating a divine manifestation. Thus, this figure is rightly identified as the pre-incarnate Christ, revealing His sovereign authority and direct engagement in Israel's history.

THE PILLAR OF CLOUD AND FIRE: A CHRISTOPHANY IN ISRAEL'S MIDST

Throughout the wilderness journey, Israel was visibly and continuously guided by a supernatural phenomenon:

"And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light... He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people." (Exodus 13:21–22)

This pillar is not merely a sign—it is **personally identified as the LORD**. The text says "**the LORD went before them**," not just that He sent a symbol. In Exodus 14:19, the narrative becomes even more precise:

"And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them."

Here, the **angel of God** is identified with the **pillar of cloud**. This "angel" (**MALAK ELOHIM**) is not a created being. He is elsewhere called "**the angel of the LORD**," who speaks as God, identifies Himself as God, and receives worship (cf. Exodus 3:2–6; Judges 13:18–22). Thus, the **visible presence** in the pillar is **the angel of the LORD**, which Scripture elsewhere treats as a Christophany—a pre-incarnate appearance of the Son.

This identification is bolstered in **Numbers 14:14**, where Moses appeals to God's past dealings with Israel:

"...thou, LORD, art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them..."

Here, the cloud is not only a sign of God's presence—it is the **form in which He was seen**. The people "saw" the LORD in the cloud, in the fire, and in His leading presence. And again, this cannot refer to the Father, who "no man hath seen" (John 1:18). The **person** in the pillar is visible, present, and active—it must be the **Son**, functioning as Israel's shepherd, protector, and guide.

PAUL'S IDENTIFICATION OF CHRIST IN THE WILDERNESS

1 Corinthians 10:4 could be cited in this context indirectly. Its real strength lies not in identifying Christ as the pillar, but in affirming His active participation in the wilderness journey:

"They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ."

The passage demonstrates that Christ was present and active in sustaining Israel. It supports the theological claim that the Son was not absent in the Old Testament, but fully engaged. Though Paul focuses on provision (the Rock), it reinforces the broader truth: Christ was personally ministering to His people during the Exodus.

When that is paired with the explicit appearances of God in the pillar, the most coherent explanation is that this was not a symbol, not an angel, and not the invisible Father—but the Son of God, pre-incarnate and manifest.

Conclusion:

The pillar of cloud and fire was not merely a sign of divine presence—it **WAS** divine presence. The LORD Himself went before Israel. He was seen in the cloud. He spoke, acted, and guided. Yet Scripture denies that any man has ever seen the Father. The only consistent conclusion is that the visible, guiding presence was the Son, mediating the glory of God and shepherding His people through the wilderness. The Angel of the LORD, the cloud, and the Rock all converge to reveal Christ at the center of Israel's deliverance—long before Bethlehem, but already Emmanuel: God with them.

THE GIVING OF THE LAW AT SINAI: THE SON'S VOICE FROM THE MOUNTAIN

“And the LORD came down upon mount Sinai, on the top of the mount...” (Exodus 19:20)

“AND ALL THE PEOPLE SAW THE THUNDERINGS, AND THE LIGHTNINGS, AND THE NOISE OF THE TRUMPET, AND THE MOUNTAIN SMOKING...” (Exodus 20:18)

“THE LORD TALKED WITH YOU FACE TO FACE IN THE MOUNT OUT OF THE MIDST OF THE FIRE.” (Deuteronomy 5:4)

At Mount Sinai, the people of Israel witnessed a direct encounter with the LORD: He descended in visible fire and smoke, accompanied by lightning, thunder, and the sound of a trumpet. They **HEARD HIS VOICE** speak the Ten Commandments. This was not a mere inward impression or prophetic vision—it was a real, sensory event involving sight, sound, and terror. So overwhelming was the experience that the people begged Moses:

“Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.” (Exodus 20:19)

The text describes God as visibly and audibly present. Yet Scripture elsewhere insists that the Father is invisible and cannot be seen or approached:

“No man hath seen God at any time...” (John 1:18)

“WHOM NO MAN HATH SEEN, NOR CAN SEE.” (1 Timothy 6:16)

So how do we reconcile these facts? The answer lies in identifying the visible and audible manifestation at Sinai not with the Father, but with the **Son**—the eternal Logos, the one who always reveals the Father.

HEBREWS 12:26 – THE VOICE THAT SHOOK THE EARTH

The New Testament gives a definitive clue. Speaking of Sinai, the writer of Hebrews says:

“Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.” (Hebrews 12:26)

In context, the "he" whose voice then shook the earth is the same "Jesus the mediator of the new covenant" mentioned just verses earlier (v.24). The implication is clear: the voice that thundered from Sinai was **the voice of Christ**. It is His voice that will once again shake not only earth but also heaven at His return.

This identification is not a theological guess—it is a direct statement from inspired Scripture, connecting the audible voice at Sinai to the same person who mediates the New Covenant: Christ.

CHRIST AS THE MEDIATOR AT SINAI

This role fits Christ's broader function as the one who mediates between God and man:

“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” (1 Timothy 2:5)

That role did not begin at His incarnation. He was the mediator in all ages, for no man has ever seen the Father or heard His voice directly (John 5:37). Every visible and audible encounter with "God" in the Old Testament, then, must have been through the person of the Son.

FACE TO FACE YET NOT SEEING THE FATHER

The Israelites are said to have heard God “face to face” (Deut. 5:4), and yet later God says:

“Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.” (Exodus 33:20)

This is no contradiction if we understand “face to face” to mean a personal, direct encounter with God in mediated form—namely, with the Son, who alone can reveal God without destroying the observer. The visible and audible manifestations are filtered through Christ, who “is the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15) and the one in whom “all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” dwells (Colossians 2:9).

ISAIAH’S VISION: THE LORD HIGH AND LIFTED UP (ISAIAH 6)

“I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.” (Isaiah 6:1)

Isaiah’s awe-inspiring vision of the LORD on His throne surrounded by seraphim concludes with him exclaiming:

“Mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.” (v.5)

However, John 12:41 interprets this vision explicitly as a vision of Christ:

“These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him.”

This affirms again that the visible glory Isaiah saw was the pre-incarnate Christ—the only visible member of the Godhead.

EZEKIEL’S VISION: THE LIKENESS OF THE GLORY OF THE LORD (EZEKIEL 1)

Ezekiel sees a breathtaking vision of a chariot-throne borne by cherubim, culminating in:

“And above the firmament... was the likeness of a throne... and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it.” (Ezekiel 1:26)

He goes on to describe fire and glory radiating from this man-like figure, concluding:

“This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.” (v.28)

This figure has the visible form of a man but radiates divine glory. It is not the invisible Father but the visible Son, appearing in glory long before the incarnation.

DANIEL’S VISION: THE ANCIENT OF DAYS AND THE SON OF MAN (DANIEL 7)

Daniel 7 presents one of the most enigmatic and majestic visions in all of Scripture. The prophet sees a succession of beastly kingdoms, followed by a heavenly courtroom scene:

“I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool...” (Daniel 7:9)

Later, Daniel sees another figure:

“And behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him.” (Daniel 7:13)

On the surface, this vision appears to depict two distinct persons: the **Ancient of Days**, often assumed to represent the Father, and the **Son of man**, clearly a messianic figure. Indeed, Jesus explicitly identifies Himself with the “Son of man” in the Gospels (e.g., Matthew 26:64), affirming the title as His own. But the scene is more complex than it appears—and, when closely examined, may actually present a double Christophany.

THE ANCIENT OF DAYS: IS THIS THE FATHER?

The Ancient of Days is described with **visible, human-like features**: a throne, white garments, white hair. He is seated in judgment, surrounded by fire and tens of thousands of ministering beings. However, Scripture consistently teaches that the Father is **invisible**, “dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see” (1 Timothy 6:16). Thus, any visible manifestation with form—especially in a judicial, royal, or revelatory role—**CANNOT** be the Father directly. It must be the Son, who is “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15), the one who **alone** reveals the Godhead in bodily form (Colossians 2:9).

In fact, the visual description of the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7:9–10 closely parallels the appearance of Christ in Revelation 1:

“His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire...” (Revelation 1:14)

These are not incidental resemblances. The shared imagery—**white hair, radiant glory, fire, judgment, and thrones**—strongly suggests that the Ancient of Days in Daniel’s vision is not the Father, but rather **a vision of Christ in judgment**. He appears again later in Daniel 7:22, where it is said that “judgment was given to the saints of the most High,” an office Scripture elsewhere assigns to the Son (cf. John 5:22: “The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son”).

THE SON OF MAN: A DISTINCT CHRISTOPHANY

Yet the Son of man is clearly a **separate** figure in this vision, coming “with the clouds of heaven” (Daniel 7:13) and being brought before the Ancient of Days. This act of approach implies distinction—two persons, both bearing divine characteristics, and both in exalted roles.

The Son of man receives an **everlasting dominion**, and the nations serve Him (Daniel 7:14). He is not a mere angelic figure or glorified human. He is worshiped, enthroned, and served in the same way that the LORD is throughout the Old Testament. This, again, can be none other than **Christ**.

What then shall we say? If the Ancient of Days is Christ, and the Son of Man is Christ, is this a contradiction? Not necessarily. One of the recurring features of Old Testament prophecy is **visionary compression**—multiple aspects of the same person or event portrayed in distinct symbolic figures to convey different roles or functions.

It is possible, even likely, that Daniel 7 presents a **dual vision of Christ**:

- As the **Ancient of Days**, He is eternal, enthroned, and judging the nations.
- As the **Son of Man**, He is incarnate, exalted, and given dominion.

This kind of double depiction is consistent with other Christophanies and with the broader biblical theme of Christ functioning in multiple roles simultaneously—God and man, judge and redeemer, priest and king.

A PRE-INCARNATE CHRIST IN BOTH FIGURES?

If this reading is correct, then Daniel 7 offers not just a pre-incarnate vision of Christ, but **two**, emphasizing both His eternal existence and His incarnate role. The Ancient of Days figure underscores His deity and eternality; the Son of man highlights His humility and exaltation.

Regardless of whether one sees both figures as Christ or just the Son of man, what remains clear is that **these are visible, bodily forms representing divine persons**. And since the Father cannot be seen, the visible presence in the vision must be the Son.

Conclusion:

Daniel 7 does not soften the veil around the Father—it reinforces it. The vision is dominated by visible, bodily manifestations of divinity. These cannot be the Father, but they match precisely with what the New Testament reveals about Christ: He is the Son of Man who ascends with the clouds (Acts 1:9–11), and He is the one who will judge the nations in glory (Matthew 25:31–32). In Daniel 7, the Son stands before Himself—the Ancient of Days—because both figures ultimately reveal different aspects of the one who is “Alpha and Omega... which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty” (Revelation 1:8).

MICAHIAH’S VISION OF THE HEAVENLY COUNCIL (1 KINGS 22:19)

In 1 Kings 22, the prophet Micaiah is called to give a word from the LORD before two kings, Ahab and Jehoshaphat. He begins by recounting a startling vision:

“I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left.” (1 Kings 22:19)

This vision is clearly a heavenly scene, a **divine council** in session. God is portrayed as enthroned, attended by multitudes of spiritual beings—angels, or possibly other created celestial intelligences. The setting is not symbolic but judicial: the LORD asks who will persuade Ahab to go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead, and a spirit volunteers to be a lying influence in the mouths of the prophets.

But the striking element is this: **Micaiah says he saw the LORD**. This is an open claim to a prophetic vision of the enthroned God.

And that demands serious theological scrutiny. John 1:18 is categorical:

“No man hath seen God at any time...”

1 Timothy 6:16 is even more emphatic:

“Whom no man hath seen, nor can see...”

These statements are not conditioned by geography. They do not say no man has seen God **ON EARTH**—they say no man has seen God, period. That includes heaven. The Father is unseen and unseeable, even by prophets in a vision.

So who did Micaiah see?

A VISIBLE LORD IN HEAVEN

If we take Scripture seriously, the only conclusion available is that the person Micaiah saw is **not the Father**. It must be the Son—the only person of the Godhead who is ever seen in bodily or visible form.

The Son is the **Logos**, the visible Word, the **express image of God’s person** (Hebrews 1:3). He is the **mediator** of all divine revelation (1 Timothy 2:5), including prophetic visions. And He is consistently the one who **sits on the throne** in similar scenes elsewhere in Scripture:

- In **Isaiah 6**, Isaiah sees the LORD “high and lifted up,” and John tells us that Isaiah was seeing **Christ’s glory** (John 12:41).
- In **Ezekiel 1**, the man on the throne is called “the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.”
- In **Revelation 5**, the Lamb stands before the throne, but by Revelation 22, the throne is “the throne of God and of the Lamb”—a **shared throne**.

If Micaiah saw a **visible, enthroned LORD**, then by process of elimination and by theological necessity, he saw the Son—**pre-incarnate, glorified, and ruling in heaven**.

AUTHORITY AND MEDIATION IN THE COUNCIL

Moreover, the LORD in this scene is not passive. He speaks. He asks questions. He evaluates options. He sends. He sits in judgment and delegates agency. This is not a generic “presence of God”—it is divine governance in action. And that fits perfectly with the Son’s role:

“The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.” (John 5:22)

Even in this celestial setting, the visible, acting figure must be the **Son functioning in His divine prerogative**, long before the incarnation.

Conclusion:

Micaiah's vision is not an anomaly. It aligns perfectly with the broader biblical pattern: whenever God is seen, it is through the **mediated, visible person of the Son**. The claim "I saw the LORD" cannot refer to the invisible Father. It must refer to the one who is the **image of the invisible God**, the **Word made flesh**, who revealed Himself long before Bethlehem—in fire, in cloud, in vision, and here, enthroned in heaven before the prophet's eyes.

SAMUEL'S CALLING: THE LORD WHO STANDS AND SPEAKS (1 SAMUEL 3:10)

"And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel."

Not only does the LORD speak, but He "comes and stands," implying visible form. Earlier in the chapter we are told:

"And the LORD revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD." (v.21)

Again, "the Word of the LORD" is both speech and person. The revelation is personal, visible, and audible—the pattern of a Christophany.

THE FOURTH MAN IN THE FIRE: A SON OF GOD (DANIEL 3:25)

"Lo, I see four men loose... and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."

Nebuchadnezzar sees a supernatural figure walking in the flames with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. While some modern versions try to soften the wording to "a son of the gods," the King James preserves what the Aramaic text allows and what Nebuchadnezzar likely inferred: a divine figure in human form, resembling "the Son of God." This rescue mission seems tailor-made for the pre-incarnate Christ.

CONCLUSION

The claim that "no man hath seen God at any time" (John 1:18) is not contradicted by the many Old Testament accounts in which individuals saw, heard, and even touched God. Rather, these accounts serve to confirm the unique mediatory role of the Son—the only member of the Godhead who has ever been seen. From patriarchs and prophets to kings and commoners, those who saw God in bodily form encountered **not the Father**, who remains unseeable and transcendent, but **the Son**, the eternal Word made visible, the image of the invisible God.

These appearances are not mere metaphors or spiritual impressions. They are tangible, sensory events. God stood. God spoke. God walked. God wrestled. God judged. Yet He did so without violating the Scripture's unwavering testimony to the Father's invisibility. The only consistent way to harmonize these realities is to recognize that every visible manifestation of God in the Old Testament is a **Christophany**—an appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ.

This pattern is not occasional but pervasive. Whether it is the man who contends with Jacob, the voice from Sinai, the LORD in the pillar, the visitor to Abraham, the enthroned Judge in Daniel, or the fourth man in the furnace, the visible God is always the Son. He reveals the Father without exposing the unfiltered holiness that would consume sinful man. He is the one who condescends to human frailty while never ceasing to be fully God.

Therefore, the Old Testament does not merely foreshadow Christ in prophecy—it **presents Him in person**, again and again. The Son did not begin His work in Bethlehem. He has been the visible God from the beginning, eternally active, eternally present, and eternally mediating the glory of the unseen Father. Every time Scripture says someone saw God, we are looking directly at the pre-incarnate Christ—God the Son, revealed yet veiled, present yet preserving, glorious yet approachable.